Public Abstract

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Title:THE USER-GENERATED DILEMMA:
Can the ways in which media organizations publish audience contributions affect the way the audience feels about the site and their intention to contribute?

More and more media organizations are using the Internet to ask their audiences to submit stories, comments and photographs, but they are seemingly doing it without understanding the implications of their actions. This study examines if the ways in which news organizations publish user-generated contributions affect how the audience feels about the organization and the site. It also looks at whether using audience contributions can have a positive effect on increasing self efficacy and encouraging future contributions. Through a 3 (story author) x 6 (experimental condition) within subjects experiment, this study compared whether stories written by staff writers, audience members or a collaborative process had an effect on 10 concepts related to the connection readers felt with the site and the author, the credibility they had in the organization and story, and the likelihood and confidence they had in being able to contribute a related story. The study suggests readers connect more with audience written stories, while placing my credibility and expertise in staff written stories. They find collaborative stories the least credible and connecting.
In the final equation, predicting their intention to contribute is a product of determine their interest in the topic, their connection to the site and the amount of self efficacy or confidence in being able to join the discussion the story inspires.